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ABSTRACT

This paper probes the conditions of student life and the needs of identity, self-esteem, and sense of personal worth and potency which can affect the students' readiness for learning. A number of crucial factors interact with the teacher's efforts to provide learning opportunities and to stimulate interest in curriculum resources. In creating an effective learning situation the teacher must consider: 1) learner participation in the development of learning goals and norms; 2) the peer power structure; 3) the distibution of acceptance and influence in the classroom; 4) opening channels of communication between himself and students, and between students, to identify and work on learning problems; 5) adapting learning opportunities and tasks to the individual; 6) the child's relationships with his teachers and other socialization agents; and 7) involving parents in the learning objectives of their children, and achieving collaboration between teachers and parents. Various types of training to develop learning readiness are critical to the educational enterprise: 1) attitude and communication skill development through sensitivity training; 2) cross-age teaching; 3) value education; 4) inquiry for problem solving and decision-making; 5) resource utilization; and, 6) self-reward. (SBE)

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THE NEGLECTED LEARNER

Ronald Lippitt

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Dr. Lippitt is Professor of Psychology and Sociology at the University of Michigan and President of the SSEC. *This article is slightly condensed from a chapter in* Social Science in the Schools: A Search for Rationale, *edited by Irving Morrissett and W. W. Stevens, Jr., to be published in 1970 by Holt, Rinehart and Winston.*

Lawrence Senesh of the University of Colorado has used the term "orchestration" to describe his view of how social scientists from the various disciplines should work together on the construction of social studies materials. This article is concerned with another type of orchestration problem—getting teachers and children to play in the same orchestra. For the most part, teachers and children are now playing in quite different orchestras.

In this paper, I will probe into the conditions of student life and the confrontations of identity, self-esteem and sense of personal worth and potency which enter into the student's readiness to be a receiver of educational opportunities. I will try to point out some data which will help us identify with the situation of the young ones on whose collaboration we have to depend if meaningful learning transactions are to occur.

In a previous statement I proposed six phases of curriculum development and change that bridge from the intellectual activity of the producer or integrator of knowledge to the learning activities of the child.[1] The phases were identified as: 1) the process of discovery, creation, formulation, or integration of basic knowledge; 2) the conversion of this knowledge into curriculum resource units, materials, frameworks, etc.; 3) a double phase—distribution of new resources by linking agents (such as publishers, regional laboratories, ESEA Title III projects, and schools of education) and the search for them by teachers, curriculum directors and, in a few interesting cases, groups of parents; 4) the adoption or adaptation of the new resources; and 6) consumption and utilization of new resources by learners.

I am concerned here only with the last step in this process, the activity of consumption or learning by the students. My observations are organized under five questions:

How do we neglect the learner?

What is the learner's existential learning situation as he sits in the classroom?

How does the learner cope with our educational efforts?

What are the conditions of an effective learning situation?

How do we train a learner to become a good learner?

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How Do We Neglect the Learner?

There are a number of ways in which we tend to neglect the learner in our teaching efforts or our preparation of materials for teaching. First, our major focus of enthusiasm and commitment is to our own specialized area of knowledge. We are concerned that our discipline or specialty get a significant amount of the child's ear, eye, and think time.

Second, our communication is often, sometimes necessarily, focused on gate-keepers rather than learners. What adaptations of our materials will be acceptable to curriculum decision-makers and teachers who must be reached? We are not pressed to give equal attention to the needs and readiness of the children.

Third, our conceptions of the consumer-learner and of his learning needs tend to be abstract, global, and occupationally oriented. We classify the learner as an age-graded or social-background cluster or group. We generalize about "the fourth grader," "the high school senior," "the central city child," etc. We also make the error of thinking of the learner as a separate entity, an individual student interacting with a teacher. This is of course an abstraction from the reality in which the learner is a member of several social contexts with many simultaneous loyalties, many commitments, and many directions of interest at any one moment. We tend to think of him in the future in producer-occupational roles like ourselves, rather than someone who now and in the future will spend most of his time as a consumer who is an intelligent or unintelligent user of the resources and services produced by others.

Fourth, we tend to ignore the young in our curriculum thinking by assuming a lack of readiness and motivation on their part to be involved in educational planning and choosing—by assuming inadequate maturity and perspective to make significant contributions to the selection of educational goals, methods, resources, or groupings.

Anyone who has taught children, field-tested materials, or closely observed the educational scene in other ways can probably add to this list.

What is the Existential Learning Situation?

What is the actual life-space of a young learner?

We must always remember that each day for our stu-

dent is a medley of interventions aimed at influencing him in some way—interventions by parents, teachers, peers, friends, neighbors, TV. He is very busy responding, reacting, initiating contacts, seeking responses.

If we focus on the classroom group, as a group, we find a number of crucial factors that interact with the teacher's efforts to provide learning opportunities and to stimulate interest in curriculum resources. In a large proportion of the classrooms in our studies, over half the children believe that the majority of other classmates disapprove of active collaboration with the teacher, of reciting and showing enthusiasm for classroom projects, of asking the teacher for help, and of being friendly with him.[2] Actually, in a significant proportion of these classrooms, the majority of the children privately feel otherwise, but they take their clues from the active, anti-learning, more hostile and impulsive members of the classroom group.

In most classrooms, the distribution of interpersonal acceptance and power among children is skewed like the curve of distribution of wealth in the nation, or more so. A few students have most of the positive acceptance of their peers and most of the influence, while most of the students have very little. This state of deprivation focuses the energy of most students on interpersonal status issues and away from academic learning challenges. Those with deprivation of interpersonal status are found to be underutilizers of their intellectual capacities in comparison with high-accepted children. There is little incentive to excel in school work to improve one's status since other skills and resources are valued much more highly.

We find the teacher's behavior reinforcing peer interactions. Low-status children get far more negative feedback from the teacher than do high-status children, and they reciprocate with negative alienation from the teacher. The findings show, impressively, that the more negative the child feels toward the teacher, the less the teacher can influence him to accept learning opportunities.

When we study the child's self-concept, or self-worth feelings, we find that most frequently he perceives teachers and other adults as seeing him more critically than positively, and as being inaccessible to influence by him in terms of having his needs heard. Negative self-conception is highly related to low motivation to learn.

Although the child's occupational role for many years from the first grade on is that of learner, few young ones have a meaningful conception of and commitment to the role of learner or a concern about the skills of competence as a learner. There is no meaningful or active involvement in learning goals, no vision of one's self as a learner, no sense of collaboration with peers in learning. For example, in one study the most frequent meaning of "helping each other in the classroom" was "cheating."

Evidence concerning the role of parents in education indicates that there is a tremendous lack of parental collaboration; that there is little orientation toward such collaboration; that there is resentment on the part of parents toward teachers; and that parents apply pressure on their children in relation to school achievement in very unskilled ways.

Still other data show a marked lack of congruence and communication between school systems and other major socialization programs of the community.

The findings just reviewed display a sample of the confused, competing, deprived learning situation of the learner-consumer in the classroom and in the larger educational community.

How Does the Learner Cope with Our Educational Efforts?

How does the student cope with variety of efforts to influence him, to get him to listen, to get him to learn something? To understand our consumer's behavior at this point we need to use the social-psychological concept of overlapping situations. The child, as he sits in the classroom, exists simultaneously in several psychological and social fields, each of which exerts an influence on him. We have already identified such fields as the teacher, peer-friends, peer-group, parents, and older peer models. There are others. In a typical study not long ago, teenagers identified from ten to forty persons and groups influencing their decisions and behavior in a week. At any one moment the child probably cannot report clearly all the competing inputs, but they do exist in different degrees of potency and awareness. What does he do to manage these often competing, confusing inputs? Four of these problem-solving postures are offered as illustrations.

One posture is what might be called "the compartmentalized solution," or "situational opportunism." Whatever stimulation is dominant at the moment is heeded at that time and other influences are blocked out. The teacher's presentation of curriculum opportunities will be attended to only when situationally more salient than peer relations or other interests. There is obviously little development of personal decision-making identity and internal commitment to learning with situational opportunism as a problem-solving posture.

A second problem-solving posture is what we call "the pervasive dominant loyalty." This method simplifies the problem by making one reference group or figure the dominant loyalty and behavioral guide across all situations, blocking out, rejecting, or withdrawing from other competing voices. This reduces the discomfort of decision-making. It also inhibits the development of the student as a self-initiating inquirer, learner, or decision-maker, and often results in a conforming dependency on parents, teacher, or peer-group.

Yet another problem-solving posture is that of "striking a balance," sometimes called a "computer solution." This is a posture of trying to please everyone as much as possible—finding compromises, doing school work but also meeting the demands of friends, trying to do projects but also following the clues of the popular kids. The amount of commitment to learning depends on the balance between all the confrontations active at any one time.

Another familiar solution has been called "a plague-on-all-your-houses"—the rejection of all external authority pressures. This posture is used frequently by dropouts and delinquents, as well as by others. The irritation and confusion of competing demands for the young person's energy made by parents, teachers, and others result in behavior which seems to say, "If you can't agree, then I am free to do whatever seems attractive to me at the moment—my impulses are my best guide." This withdrawal from the influence arena receives support from the

child's need for autonomy, from his negative feelings about authority, and from the attractiveness of the inner pleasure-seeking voices.

Even when the teacher does successfully attract or compel the focal energy of the child, his learning behavior usually leaves much to be desired. Most frequently, the learning effort which is made and rewarded is a lip-service response, or "cognitive closure"—something that can be intellectually categorized and fed back to the teacher in some form. There is very little sense of relation to here-and-now living, to emotional commitment, to value confrontation, or to action challenge. The child may learn to be an observer or analyst, but not an actor or volunteer. He may develop skills as a critic, but not as a creator. He may become sophisticated, but not committed. He may become a very sensitive responder to clues and cues, but not an initiator of questions for action.

While creative educators today are focusing, more than ever, on the problems which I have outlined, our total educational effort is still one in which motivation is discouragingly low and learning opportunities are squandered. It is certainly one of the most tragic resource wastages in our culture.

What Are the Conditions of an Effective Learning Situation?

What are some conditions of an effective learning situation that can be derived from the preceding findings? All of us want the young ones to consume more learning opportunities. The derivations I make from the conditions described are the following:

1) *The teacher must involve the learners in the development of learning goals and norms.* Group norms must support rather than inhibit learning; they must involve the students in the development and maintenance of learning conditions.

Let us take an example from a fifth-grade class which will illustrate how these norms can be developed. The class has been asked to respond to this confrontation: "If a visitor from Mars walked in here today who was interested in education but knew nothing about American education, what would be the things that, if he saw them, would be signs that we were having a good learning day, and what would be the signs that we were having a bad learning day?" A steering committee which changes each week has been set up. The first steering committee represents four of the sociometric power figures of the class—two pro-learning and two anti-learning leaders. They appoint the next steering committee, which appoints the next one, and so on, the rule being that everyone goes through steering committee membership before anyone is on a second time. By the time the less influential children become members of the steering committee, group norms about how the process operates have been established.

The first task of the steering committee is to provide leadership in establishing criteria for good and bad learning days. They post the criteria on two large sheets of newsprint. The teacher, of course, has helped to train the steering committee to lead a problem-solving discussion and to avoid, for example, being punitive toward others who express "queer" ideas. The teacher contributes her own criteria and is active in stimulating the search for resources and ideas in addition to those the children first put up.

Each day, during the last fifteen minutes, a member of the steering committee reports his observations with respect to the two sets of criteria concerning how the class has done that day. There may also be discussion and decisions about changing the criteria before the next day begins. At the end of the week, the whole steering committee leads a half-hour discussion on whether they want to revise the criteria before they turn the material over to the next steering committee.

This example is but one way in which learners can become involved in setting their own goals and norms.

2) *The teacher must accept the reality of the peer power structure.* There are others in the classroom group who in many ways have more power than the teacher does about the learning process. He must involve these peer leaders in improving the learning conditions of the classroom in ways similar to that mentioned above or in planning meetings in which he frankly requests the collaboration of student leaders.

3) *The teacher must work to change the distribution of acceptance and influence in the classroom.* Though the teacher must, of necessity, work with the existing student power structure, he should try to encourage the class to develop norms of acceptance and support for varied ability and for recognition of the differences in developmental levels of people of the same age in the same group at the same time. I am reminded, for example, of a sixth-grade classroom that I recently visited. At the back of the room was a directory of "who is good at what in our class." If anyone needed help, whether it was shooting baskets in the gym, or working on math or whatever it was, they used the directory to find out who would be a good tutor or helper for their particular need.

4) *The teacher must open up channels of communication between himself and students and among students in order to identify and work on the problems which block learning.* Not long ago, I was in a classroom where the children were doing ratings of the way in which they perceived the teacher and her help to them in learning, and the teacher was rating them as a learning group. After making the ratings, they put the two sets of data on the board so they could see how the teacher rated them and how she was rated by them. Then they discussed who needed to change in what ways to make the class a better place in which to learn.

There would be, I think, a great upsurge in the quality of education and the motivation of students if the school staff acted as though there were a National Association of Students for the Improvement of Education with an active chapter in their building. This would make a great difference in the psychological orientation of teachers.

5) *The teacher must do everything feasible to adapt the learning opportunities and tasks to the differential needs, capacities, and interests of the individual pupils in the class.* I have mentioned the resource directory. There are many other ways of developing the norm of peers helping peers in the classroom. One of the crucial elements often left out of the helper plans is that there must be peer training in the techniques of helping.

One of the most exciting projects that we have been

engaged in is that of older students acting as academic helpers of the youngers.[3] Currently in one central city school system, thirty high school volunteers act as academic aides in the junior high and elementary schools. There are also about thirty junior high school students working in the elementary school and about thirty fifth- and sixth-graders in the first and second grades. The high school helpers are in a behavioral science course for which they get regular credit. They get three periods of field work a week, being teachers and helpers, and two periods of seminar work on understanding the motivation of young ones and the techniques of helping. One of the greatest results is that the academic achievement and commitment of the olders increases immediately, as does the individualization of instruction for the youngers.

6) *Everything possible must be done to increase the congruence and continuity of the child's relations to his various teachers and to the other socialization agents and to increase his own active role in decision-making in reciprocal influence relations with them.* The learner must become an active selector among the medley of opportunities, and he must become an intelligent defender of his personal integrity and selfhood against the many demands which to him are meaningless, or which demand dependence, or which are inappropriate to his own level of readiness and maturity. He must learn to be an intelligent defender against all the encroachments on his time and energy.

7) *Finally, everything possible must be done to involve parents in the learning objectives of their children and to achieve congruence and collaboration between teachers and parents in providing support for learning.* There are many interesting ways to brief parents on what would be helpful support: for example, the telephone conference. In our work with teachers, we sometimes have eight or nine teachers at once in different locations in telephone conferences. The same procedure would be quite helpful in the briefing of parents. Another method would be to use an electronic secretary, so that parents could call a telephone number and record any information they have, to be picked up at any time during the day by the teacher. The development of room meetings as genuine work sessions rather than as show-off periods is also important.

How Do We Train a Child to Become a Good Learner?

No matter how well we provide better conditions for learning, one of the most exciting and neglected jobs is the direct consumer education of the child. He must learn to seek, use, and create better educational opportunities. It seems clear that we want and need learners who are initiators—active seekers rather than passive recipients. We want consumers who are selective, who can use criteria of relevance rather than being uncritical buyers of what is offered. We want consumers who are eager for new learning tastes, eager for new risks rather than conforming and self-satisfied with having gotten such-and-such a score on a test. We want consumers who can reward themselves for good decision-making and for significant action efforts, rather than for getting the answers right for the teacher. With these criteria in mind, let us review briefly what we know about motivation and learning by means of the following types of training for learning. I have seen all of these approaches used, and they seem to be a critical part of the educational enterprise.

1) *Training in the attitudes and skills of learning from adults, of having creative, active, cross-generational communication.* We have in our social studies curriculum for example, a unit on "learning from grownups," in which the students role-play behavioral specimens of relations between teachers and students.[4] The students in the roles soliloquize: "What is going on? Why are they not asking for help?" or "Why are they asking for help all the time and being over-dependent?" Other pupils observe, analyze in lab teams, and come up with proposals of how these situations might be changed and how communication between teachers and pupils might be improved. Then the teams put on demonstrations of improvements, giving their evidence on what would cause a difference in learning if a new outlook on learning from grownups were developed.

2) *Training in how to use resource persons other than the teacher.* In our training classes, a resource person often observes students putting on the board questions they really want to explore, which demonstrates where they are in their thinking. The bottom third of the board is left empty. The resource person is then asked to add his expert questions which help get at the kinds of information the students want to know. Then we move into a dialogue of the group with the resource person.

3) *Training in the skills and responsibilities of reciprocal influence.* Instead of using the slow-down and sit-in, which are negative resistance postures and procedures, students should learn positive, responsible methods of influencing adults. These skills are developed frequently through mutual feedback and evaluation of what is going on in the classroom. The teacher reports ways in which he feels the learner role is being played inadequately and the pupils give their thoughts about ways in which they are not getting the kind of help they would like.

In our "bridging the generations" project, we have had, for several years, lower-class and middle-class teenagers working together on the problems of communication with adults. They decided to initiate teacher- and parent-education programs to get adults involved in understanding the way teenagers look at the world. With consultation, they developed teacher and parent nights in which typically they would put on a role-playing episode of a problem of communication between teenagers and adults. Teachers, parents, and teenagers would sit in diagnostic teams, observing this episode and collecting data on what they felt were the reasons for the problem of communication and ways to change and improve the situation. They moved from these diagnostic teams into demonstrations of how communication might be facilitated.

4) *Training in linking learning intentions or commitments to learning actions and efforts.* When the citizens of one city became aware of the lack of correlation between knowledge of right and wrong and actual behavior patterns of youth, they formed a curriculum development committee made up of religious, business, and educational leaders to work on an educational program which is now called "The Deciders." They worked out a curriculum in value education and decision-making that would be acceptable to both the values experts and the school system. They came out with a very exciting program—a "hit" in training materials.

The training groups usually were led by pairs of citizens, sometimes a teacher and a layman, sometimes a husband and wife. They worked on the problem of linking what we know is the thing to do with actually doing it. Among the self-inquiry projects generated were equilibrium analyses of questions such as "What are the forces for and against putting more learning effort into a committed learning task?" and "What are the forces for and against my doing any of the things I have just planned to do?"

5) *Training in using peers as learning resources.* The lack of communication where help-seeking and help-giving is not a norm is a tragedy. I have mentioned a classroom helper directory as one method of facilitating mutual assistance in peer groups. In most situations, we need to start with methodological training in skills of giving and getting help.

6) *Practice and support for practice in identifying with good teachers, or modeling.* Learning to teach others is another one of the important learner-training techniques that I have mentioned. The great response of failing lower-class black students in becoming active learners as they study the problems of young ones like themselves is inspiring. They are really studying themselves at a safe distance—looking at their own problems of motivation and ego needs. They talk very freely in sixth-grade and junior-high seminars about ego needs, about overcoming resistance, about being a good model, and about not creating dependency.

7) *Training to function in problem-solving inquiry teams.* There are lots of notions about the need for inquiry, but very little training in how to be a good team. Students often experience serious failures; if the teacher has to step in frequently, dependency is fostered. Therefore, training in skills to make learners productive in group situations is essential, no matter what the curriculum content.

8) *Training to develop internalized bases of self-reward and the feelings of success.* Children can get great excitement from working on questions such as "What is the meaning of learning for me?" and "What are the signs that I am learning something?"

Conclusion

All this may sound a bit idealistic or impractical in terms of expectations for teachers; but my observation is that such a program of learner sensitivity training is crucial. It is the basic linkage between the curriculum and the learner. It is the determiner of the educational payoff.

Our experience is that teachers can be taught to do the job, if they are given the opportunity to learn. They, too, have been neglected. An amazing number of teachers are eager learners when they have the opportunity to experience the potential for self-renewal in personal and professional improvement opportunities. This is particularly true when they see that professional improvement can release them from energy-depleting burdens of caretaking activities for half-hearted pupils and permit them to move toward the exhilirating role of designer of inquiry opportunities—a teacher of how to learn, a presenter of exciting problem confrontations, a guide to learning resources.

But teacher training is another story. I have been concerned here with the problem of the learner and what he does with opportunities presented to him. We can design a great curriculum but have very poor consumption of it.

Notes

[1]Ronald Lippitt, 'Processes of Curriculum Change," in Robert R. Leeper, ed., *Curriculum Change, Direction and Process* (Washington, D.C.: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, NEA, 1966), pp. 43-59.

[2]The reference is to research activities of the Center for Research on the Utilization of Scientific Knowledge at the University of Michigan.

[3]This refers to the *Cross-Age Helping Program* designed by Peggy Lippitt, Jeffrey W. Eiseman, and Ronald Lippitt (copyright, University of Michigan, 1968).

[4]This refers to Unit 7, "Influencing Each Other," of the *Social Science Laboratory Units* by Ronald Lippitt, Robert Fox, and Lucille Schaible (Chicago: Science Research Associates, Inc., 1969).